

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Amended): A method for using a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, comprising
 - a voice-messaging system receiving a toll-free call placed by a user;
 - verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;
 - receiving from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;
 - receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;
 - ~~placing a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user establishing a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line;~~
 - ~~disconnecting the voice-messaging system from the call;~~ and
 - charging a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.
2. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.
3. (Canceled):
4. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.
5. (Canceled):

6. (Previously Presented): The method as recited in claim 4, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

7. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

8. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.

9. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

10. (Canceled):

11. (Canceled):

12. (Canceled):

13. (Amended): An article of manufacture, comprising:
a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture comprising;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a toll-free call placed by a user;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to establish a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to disconnect the voice messaging system from the call;

~~computer-readable program means for causing a computer to place a telephone call to the third party telephone line associated with the third party telephone number entered by the user; and~~

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to charge a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

14. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

15. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and verify a user-identification code and a password code.

16. (Canceled):

17. (Previously Presented): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 15, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

18. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

19. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

20. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

21. (Cancelled):

22. (Cancelled):

23. (Cancelled):

24. (Previously Presented): A method of using a voice messaging system to place a telephone call, comprising:

establishing a user account for a user, wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;

issuing the user an user-identification code and a password code associated with the user account;

providing the user a toll-free number by which to access the voice messaging system;

receiving a call from the user via the toll-free number;

verifying that the user is a valid user by receiving and verifying the user-identification code and password code associated with the user account;

receiving a request from the user to place a telephone call;

receiving from the user the telephone number to call;

placing the call to the telephone number; and

charging the user account of the user the pre-determined rates if the call is connected.

25. (New): A method for using a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, comprising

- a voice-messaging system receiving a toll-free call placed by a user;
- verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;
- receiving from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;
- receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;
- establishing a 3-way call between the user, the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line; and
- charging a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

26. (New): The method as recited in claim 25, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.

27. (New): The method as recited in claim 25, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.

28. (New): The method as recited in claim 27, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

29. (New): The method as recited in claim 25, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

30. (New): The method as recited in claim 25, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.

31. (New): The method as recited in claim 25, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

32. (New): An article of manufacture, comprising:
a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture comprising;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a toll-free call placed by a user;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to establish a three-way call between the user, the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line; and
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to charge a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

33. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

34. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and verify a user-identification code and a password code.

35. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 34, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

36. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

37. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

38. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 32, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

39. (New): A method for using a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, comprising

 a voice-messaging system receiving a toll-free call placed by a user;
 verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;
 receiving from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;
 receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;

 placing a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user;

 during or after the call between the user and the third party, receiving a pre-defined signal from the user;

 transferring the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu; and

charging a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

40. (New): The method as recited in claim 39, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.

41. (New): The method as recited in claim 39, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.

42. (New): The method as recited in claim 41, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

43. (New): The method as recited in claim 39, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

44. (New): The method as recited in claim 39, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.

45. (New): The method as recited in claim 39, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

46. (New): An article of manufacture, comprising:
a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture comprising;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a toll-free call placed by a user;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to place a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a pre-defined signal from the user during or after the call between the user and the third party;

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to transfer the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu; and

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to charge a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

47. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

48. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and verify a user-identification code and a password code.

49. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 48, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

50. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

51. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

52. (New): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 46, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.